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Honors Humanities

Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand

“To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything else.” This quote from Barnadette Devlin reflects the life of Bakha, an Untouchable in the Indian caste system. Throughout this novel the author focused on the troubles Bakha and his family endured, but it wasn’t until the end when this eighteen year old discovered that everything he really needed in life he already had. Mulk Raj Anand opened the reader’s eyes to a more humble way of life, even if that meant giving up everything they had.

As previously stated, the Untouchables, members of the Bhangi caste, lived the most degrading lives in India. The finale of this book was no different from the beginning as it brought to life the true horrors and struggles that the Bhangi members faced. However, Bakha does begin to discover hope for himself and his family. He’s inspired by the Christian Missionary, Mahatma Gandhi, and the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar, who have all serve as revolutionaries in the fight against caste discrimination. Bakha feels for the first time in his life that his people, the Untouchables, have a voice; finally people are beginning to see how immoral the treatment of these people is.

Barnadette Devlin’s quote “To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything,” applies to this novel in more ways than one. The first I believe concerns the rights of the Bhangi people. In order for them to become equal in the eyes of the rest of India, the Untouchable first had to be below the bottom of the caste totem pole. It reminds me of the saying “things have to get worse before they can get better.” In another light, Barnadette’s quote can refer to the closeness between family members when enduring extremely challenging situations. Bakha says himself that the bond between the Untouchables is the closest of all the castes; and the book concludes with Bakha returning home to tell his family his new found hope for their family because of the growing strength of activists around India. In either interpretation of the quote, the Bhangi caste had to lose everything in order to realize what they truly had.